

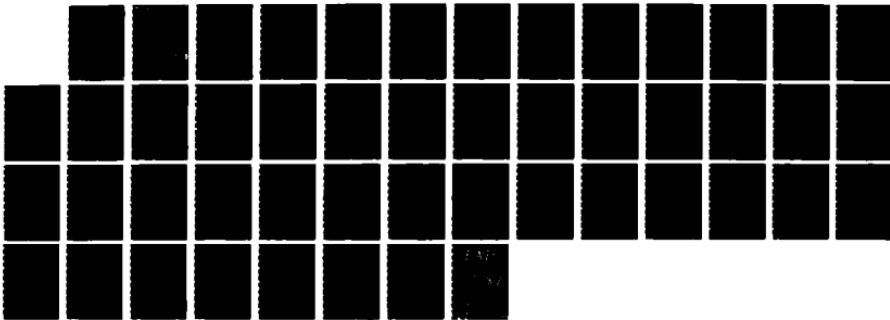
RD-A184 739 RETROGRADE: A TOOL FOR THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER(U) 1/1
ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLL FORT LEAVENWORTH KS
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES D D TINDOLL

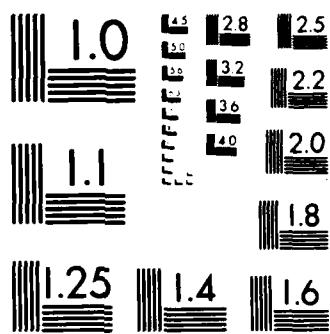
UNCLASSIFIED

28 APR 87

F/G 15/6

NL





MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS 1964

DTIC FILE COPY

(2)

AD-A184 739

Retrograde: A Tool for the Operational Commander.

by

**Major Davis D. Tindoll Jr.
Aviation**

**School of Advanced Military Studies
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

25 April 1987

**SDTIC
ELECTED
SEP 25 1987
E**

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

87-3068

87 9 18 020

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No 0704-0188
Exp Date Jun 30, 1986

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY	3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.	
2b DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		
4 PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION School of Advanced Military Studies, USAGC, GSC	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable) AFML-SIV	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)		10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS PROGRAM ELEMENT NO. PROJECT NO. TASK NO. WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)

Retrograde: A tool for the Operational Commander (U)

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)

AJ Davis D. Lindoll Jr., USA

13a. TYPE OF REPORT Monograph	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 07/4/25	15. PAGE COUNT 41
----------------------------------	--	--	----------------------

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION

17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP	operational maneuver
			retrograde
			military theory

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

This study investigates the criteria an operational commander must examine to decide if he should conduct a voluntary retrograde operation. The Army's current doctrine addresses how to conduct a retrograde but not why. The aim of this study is to demonstrate why a retrograde operation could be an important tool used by an operational commander to orchestrate his campaign effectively. Initially, to acquire some insights about the capabilities and benefits to be derived from retrograde operations, this study will discuss the axioms of three notable military theorists. The theorists are Carl von Clausewitz, Baron de Jomini, and L. V. L'huillier. Next, is an historical analysis based on three successful retrograde operations conducted during the Second World War. These campaigns begin with Erwin Rommel's 1941 withdrawal in North Africa. Erich von Manstein's winter campaign on the Russian front in 1942-43 is next. The third analysis

20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS	21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL AJ Davis D. Lindoll Jr.	22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (713) 734-2103 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL AFML-SIV

CERTIFIED FROM SOURCE 17.

is Sir William Slim's 1944 withdrawal to Imphal-Kohima in Burma. The historical examples provide insights concerning the criteria each respective commander considered before deciding to conduct a retrograde operation.

The study concludes by examining the historical, theoretical, and contemporary implications for retrograde operations. There are four general sets of conclusions to be drawn from the historical examples. These concern the motivation of the commander, the relative effect of a retrograde on sustainment, the necessity for concentration of the withdrawing force, and those independent variables that contribute to the success of such maneuvers. The theoretical conclusions address the apparent validity of the propositions presented in the introduction. Finally, the contemporary implications highlight the lessons of this study that might be of interest to an operational commander in the Central European theater.

School of Advanced Military Studies

Monograph Approval

Name of Student: Major Davis D. Tindoll Jr.

Title of Monograph: Retrograde: A Tool for the Operational Commander.

Approved by:

Richard Swain
(COL Richard M. Swain, Ph.D.)

Seminar Leader

Richard Sinnreich
(COL Richard Hart Sinnreich, MA)

Director, School of
Advanced Military Studies

Philip J. Brookes
(Philip J. Brookes, Ph. D.)

Director, Graduate
Degree Programs

Accepted this 20th day of May 1987.

ABSTRACT

Retrograde: A Tool for the Operational Commander.
by Major Davis D. Tindoll Jr., USA, 41 pages.

This study investigates the criteria an operational commander must examine to decide if he should conduct a voluntary retrograde operation. The Army's current doctrine addresses how to conduct a retrograde but not why. The aim of this study is to demonstrate why a retrograde operation could be an important tool used by an operational commander to orchestrate his campaign effectively. Initially, to acquire some insights about the capabilities and benefits to be derived from retrograde operations, this study will discuss the axioms of three notable military theorists. The theorists are Carl von Clausewitz, Baron de Jomini, and B. H. Liddell-Hart.

Next, is an historical analysis based on three successful retrograde operations conducted during the Second World War. These campaigns begin with Erwin Rommel's 1941 withdrawal in North Africa. Erich von Manstein's winter campaign on the Russian front in 1942-43 is next. The third analysis is Sir William Slim's 1944 withdrawal to Imphal-Kohima in Burma. The historical examples provide insights concerning the criteria each respective commander considered before deciding to conduct a retrograde operation.

The study concludes by examining the historical, theoretical, and contemporary implications for retrograde operations. There are four general sets of conclusions to be drawn from the historical examples. These concern the motivation of the commander, the relative effect of a retrograde on sustainment, the necessity for concentration of the withdrawing force, and those independent variables that contribute to the success of such maneuvers. The theoretical conclusions address the apparent validity of the propositions presented in the introduction. Finally, the contemporary implications highlight the lessons of this study that might be of interest to an operational commander in the Central European Theater.



Accession No.	
WTG - GRD	
Ref ID:	
Document and Classification	
By	
Classification/ Sensitivity Codes	
Print and/or Int Special	
A-1	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGES
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS	5
A. Rommel's North African Operation: Nov 1941 to Jan 1942 . .	5
B. Manstein's Winter Campaign in Southern Russia: 1942-43 . .	13
C. Slim's 1944 Imphal-Kohima Campaign	18
III. CONCLUSION	26
A. Conclusions from History	26
B. Theoretical Conclusions	29
C. Contemporary Implications	32
VI. ENDNOTES	35
VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	39

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to determine the significant criteria an operational commander must examine to decide if he should conduct a voluntary retrograde operation. Retrograde operations are a form of the defensive. They have provided success to operational commanders in the past. During World War II great commanders like Slim, Rommel, and Manstein employed the retrograde to achieve their operational goals. A retrograde is an important tool the operational level commander can use to orchestrate his battle or campaign effectively.

Field Manual 100-5 states that a retrograde is a movement to the rear or away from the enemy.¹ This maneuver can be forced or voluntary. The purpose of retrograde operations may be to gain time, preserve the force, avoid combat under undesirable conditions, or draw the enemy into an unfavorable position. Commanders may use the retrograde to harass, exhaust, resist, delay, and to damage an enemy. There are three types of retrograde operations; delays, withdrawals, and retirements.

American commanders have a reluctance to accept retrograde operations as a form of operational maneuver. This reluctance is evident in field training exercises and wargames. The Army's current doctrine addresses how to conduct a retrograde but not why. Therefore, this monograph will examine the reasons why some successful retrograde operations have been conducted in order to develop generalizations useful for contemporary operational planning.

To acquire some insights about the capabilities and benefits to be derived from retrograde operations one can turn to several notable military

theorists. Three such theorists are Carl von Clausewitz, Baron de Jomini, and B. H. Liddell-Hart.

Clausewitz discussed retrograde operations in regard to retreats to the interior of one's own country.² He stressed the necessity for a defender to retreat voluntarily with his forces intact and alert, in order not to allow the enemy to take up a pursuit. By orienting on the attacker's main force and maintaining constant resistance, the defender could control the actions of the aggressor. In this way the defender could guide the operation and force the attacker to react to the defender's actions.³ This provided greater agility to the defender. There were two drawbacks to this maneuver.⁴ The first was the loss of terrain. The second was the moral impact produced among the defending forces by voluntarily giving up ground. The first drawback could not be helped. However, the second could be mitigated by the strong will of the commander. It was important for the defender not to allow his forces to engage in a major battle until the enemy strength was weakened. Therefore it was important to avoid defeat by yielding contested ground in time. Clausewitz stated that the strength of the attacker would degrade while on the offensive.⁵ Once the attacker was about to reach his culminating point the defender should exert as much pressure as possible on the enemy's rear and lines of communication.

Jomini described a retrograde as the most difficult operation in war.⁶ He believed that the theory of war had overlooked the intricacies of the retrograde. He argued that any retrograde left the defender's forces in a bad state.⁷ This resulted in the first place from the physical weakness of the defender consequent to the sustained combat that would ordinarily require a commander to conduct this maneuver. It was also due to the effect on the morale of the defending forces, whether the withdrawal be voluntary or

forced. According to Jomini the primary principle in performing a retrograde was to concentrate one's forces so the attacker would not defeat the withdrawing elements piecemeal. Jomini recommended three primary justifications for a retrograde; to "retire before fighting in order to draw his adversary to a position which he prefers to his present one," to "retire in order to get nearer to the supply base", and to "retire after a lost battle or unsuccessful operation."⁸

B. H. Liddell-Hart believed there were two decisive and economical forms of strategy.⁹ Both dealt with the indirect approach. One was an elastic defense or calculated retirement that was concluded by a tactical offensive. The second, not a retrograde, was an offensive operation aimed to place one's forces on a position vital to the opponent concluding with a tactical defensive.¹⁰ Liddell-Hart believed that the evolution of weapons since the First World War made retrograde operations simpler and less hazardous than ever before.¹¹ Both forms utilized the stronger form of warfare, the defensive, to attain decisive victory.

The elastic defensive or calculated retirement was based on a defensive-offensive strategy which Hart believed to be the most fruitful in history.¹² This operational plan was to induce the enemy to exhaust himself by attacking one's defensive positions. Once the enemy had reached his culminating point the offensive part of the the strategy was to take place with an immediate counterstroke.

Liddell-Hart's second form of decisive strategy may also be termed the baited offensive.¹³ This was a combination of offensive strategy with defensive tactics that retained the initiative. Modern weapons offered a commander the mobility and firepower necessary to incorporate this type of maneuver into his plans. The basis of the maneuver was seizure of

objectives critical to the enemy thereby forcing him to attack in order to regain the valued object. This offered an offensive minded commander an opportunity to counterattack and continue the offensive once the enemy weakened his forces attempting to regain the objective.

The methodology of this monograph is as follows. An historical analysis of three World War II campaigns will be presented to gain insights from successful retrograde operations. This analysis begins with Erwin Rommel's 1941 withdrawal in North Africa. It then discusses Erich von Manstein's winter campaign on the Russian front in 1942-43. It closes with examination of Sir William Slim's withdrawal to Imphal-Kohima in Burma. Based on this analysis, the paper will conclude with a discussion of the points which might suggest a retrograde operation in Central Europe. This analysis will focus on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Central Army Group area of operations.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Rommel's North African Operations : Nov 1941 to Jan 1942.

Erwin Rommel's operations in the North African desert in late 1941 and early 1942 demonstrate the use of an operational retrograde to preserve a force and establish conditions for offensive operations. This section of the paper will begin with an assessment of the situation of the opposing forces in November 1941. A discussion of the effect of the British Crusader offensive on Rommel's dispositions follows. An analysis addresses the alternatives Rommel considered before deciding to withdraw and the reasons why he chose this particular course of action. The conclusion examines the benefits of this retrograde and the outcome of the counteroffensive that followed.¹⁴

In November 1941, Colonel General Erwin Rommel's forces had advanced to a line east of the port of Tobruk. Tobruk was a useful port. Occupied by the British Imperial forces, it formed a flanking position on Rommel's line of communications. Tobruk was a strongpoint that threatened Rommel's freedom of advance. Rommel's force, Panzergruppe Afrika, was conducting a siege of Tobruk while awaiting reinforcements. Rommel was faced with a number of problems. His force had limited depth and supplies were uncertain. His commanders anticipated that the British would take advantage of the opportunity presented by Panzergruppe Afrika's numerical and logistical inferiority. Rommel was waiting for the logistical situation to improve so he could launch an offensive to continue his attack on British forces in North Africa. Seizure of the Tobruk garrison would be an important objective in any offensive.

The British Imperial Army consisted of two Corps positioned in Egypt preparing for an offensive. A garrison of one division and one tank brigade defended Tobruk. Churchill prodded the British generals to launch an offensive as soon as possible. There were political reasons which called for action. The British generals did not want to repeat Operation Battleaxe with hasty preparation, lack of reinforcements, and no time to train. The British, like the Germans, were reequipping and building up supplies.

The British had been successful interdicting the extended Axis lines of communication. As a result, only one-third of the troop reinforcements and one-seventh of the supplies dispatched from Italy reached Panzergruppe Afrika.¹⁵ The British won the race reequipping, gained a superiority of numbers and materials, and preempted an Axis offensive by their own attack on the 18th of November.

The British Eighth Army under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Cunningham launched an offensive code named Crusader. They attacked with a front of two Corps and achieved operational and tactical surprise. Rommel was hesitant to accept the fact that the British had launched a major offensive. Initially, he believed the British were conducting a reconnaissance in force.¹⁶ As Eighth Army concentrated armor and air power for their main striking force they made a tactical error in the deployment of their armored units. They split their armored forces between Gabr Saleh and Sidi Rezegh thus permitting their piecemeal destruction. Rommel and his subordinate commanders took advantage of this error and maneuvered their generally inferior armored forces to destroy the enemy's main striking force by a concentric attack. This offered Rommel the opportunity to regain the initiative and his army dealt the British a heavy blow at Sidi Rezegh.

Influenced by the success at Sidi Rezegh, Rommel regained confidence that Tobruk could still be taken. He believed the enemy was totally disorganized and susceptible to an exploitation. Rommel made the decision to strike deep into the enemy's rear with the following plan:

"The greater part of the force aimed at Tobruk has been destroyed; now we will turn east and go for the New Zealanders and Indians before they have been able to join up with the remains of their main force for a combined attack on Tobruk. At the same time we will take Habata and Maddalena and cut off their supplies. Speed is vital; we must make the most of the shock effect of the enemy's defeat and push forward immediately and as fast as we can with our entire force to Sidi Omar."¹⁷

Rommel assumed a great deal of risk in deciding to continue with an offensive to ensure destruction of British forces. Instead of waiting to reorganize the Afrika Corps he took personal control of the situation to strike with the utmost speed.

The British 7th Armored Division had been beaten badly in the Sidi Rezegh battle. However, the Tobruk garrison remained intact and active within strong defenses. The Second New Zealand Division moving toward Tobruk threatened the Axis advance toward Egypt by seizing key points south of Tobruk. This unexpected development forced a halt to the Axis pursuit in order for the Germans to deal with the more immediate threat. Rommel concentrated his forces to defeat the Second New Zealand division. Next, Rommel attempted to deliver the knockout blow to the British by attacking to restore the Sollum front. This tactical offensive incorporated three separate operations that failed due to inadequate forces. The following day Rommel's intelligence sources pictured a strong British force approaching from the south. The British were pulling back into the garrison

of Tobruk while reinforcing their maneuver forces with the 1st Armored Division, 2 infantry brigades, and 2 armored car regiments.¹⁸

Rommel had failed in assessing the disorganization of his own forces when he ordered a pursuit. After the series of battles beginning with Sidi Rezegh, the German forces were insufficient to maintain the force surrounding Tobruk and take the offensive. Panzergruppe Afrika had suffered heavily in losses of men and material. Only 40 tanks, of the 250 on hand prior to commencement of Crusader, remained operational.

Ammunition stocks reached the critical stage. Losses of experienced officers reduced the overall effectiveness of the command.¹⁹ Italian commanders reported that their troops were exhausted and not fit for action. Italian staff officers sent by Mussolini arrived in early December to inform Rommel that no reinforcements were expected to arrive before the beginning of January. Supplies for Panzergruppe Afrika would be limited to the bare essentials. A lack of air support affected Rommel's operational capability while the British enjoyed outstanding air support. The Royal Navy and Air Force, with the aid of Ultra, had intelligence on every convoy movement across the Mediterranean. This allowed easy interdiction of Axis supplies.²⁰ Time was at hand for Rommel to consider a change in his dispositions.

Rommel had few alternatives. There were four possible courses of action. He could plan an indirect offensive thrust to seize Tobruk or destroy Eighth Army's center of gravity. He could defend in place with a small mobile reserve and seek to wear down the enemy. He could conduct a retrograde operation to preserve his force. He could capitulate and surrender his forces.

Rommel had lost momentum and the element of surprise for continued offensive operations. He was facing strong enemy forces that

were intact and fighting aggressively. The fighting strength of his forces was diminishing rapidly due to logistical problems. His troops were tired and had suffered numerous casualties. Supplies he had requested from the Italians in order to maintain his present position of defense were not available. Still, Rommel knew he was not close to the point of considering capitulation. The numerical superiority of the enemy and the condition of Rommel's troops forced him to consider the benefits of a retrograde operation.²¹

Rommel's Italian superiors had no disagreement regarding a withdrawal because they were already upset about how the battle was progressing and worried about continued pressure from the British. However, they did not want to give up Cyrenaica. They wanted Rommel to withdraw from Tobruk but retain a defensive position in Cyrenaica. They feared political difficulties involved with the loss of Cyrenaica. Pressure was placed on Rommel by the Italian high command and Field Marshal Kesselring. Rommel adamantly disagreed with their plan.²² Generale d'Armata Ettore Bastico, commander in chief of all North Africa, did not agree with Rommel's analysis of the situation but he could not offer a better solution in light of current events.

Rommel's choice was easy. The British would have an opportunity for complete destruction of North African Axis forces if he was forced to stay and defend Cyrenaica. The loss of Cyrenaica would occur anyway since Rommel did not have a credible capability to defend. The obvious choice was to retreat, to lose possession of Cyrenaica but defend Tripolitania.²³

Rommel decided to conduct a retrograde operation to conserve his combat power. To stay longer at Tobruk would allow a steady decline of his

forces and eventually lead to the loss of Libya. He ordered his forces to retreat on the 14 of December 1942.

The withdrawal was accomplished in ten days over a distance of 500 miles. The British had several opportunities to exploit and outflank the Axis forces. They could not take advantage of these opportunities because of the difficulties created by the lengthening of their logistical lines and German efficiency. Rommel's commanders kept the retrograde operation mobile and counterattacked at the tactical level. The diary of the Afrika Corps demonstrates the success of the withdrawal with the entry on the 17th of December: "According to subsequent dispatches of the U.S. ambassador in Cairo, we had driven straight through the British Twenty-Second Armored Brigade. He describes it as a masterpiece."²⁴

The withdrawal enabled Rommel's troops to rest and regain their strength. The supply situation for Panzergruppe Afrika was improved by the shortening of the Axis lines of communication. In addition, the strategic resupply effort was improved by the shift of Luftflotte 2 from the Russian front to Sicily and Southern Italy. Their presence deprived the British of air superiority in the Mediterranean and led to a marked improvement in the ability of Axis powers to supply their forces in Africa.²⁵ The Axis forces in North Africa received shipments of critical combat equipment, particularly tanks and armored cars. Rommel soon concluded he could resume the offensive in light of his renewed strength.

As Panzergruppe Afrika grew stronger, Rommel contemplated the possibility of offensive operations. Rommel's intelligence picture also improved through the use of wireless intercept and air reconnaissance, the combination of which provided him with a good picture of British dispositions. The British now had severe logistical problems. Their lines of

communications stretched over 1000 miles. The British Eighth Army was spread thin from the Egyptian frontier to Mersa Brega. This allowed for the opportunity to defeat them piecemeal. At the same time, the Royal Air Force was shifting assets to the Far East to support forces fighting the Japanese.²⁶ Now, Rommel could concentrate superior forces at decisive points.

Rommel counterattacked on the 21st of January 1942. The offensive began with a deception of a continued withdrawal that enabled Panzergruppe Afrika to achieve surprise. Rommel massed forces and attacked quickly in order to throw the British off balance. The success of this operation enabled his forces to capture large numbers of enemy troops and critically needed equipment that could be utilized by his forces. His counteroffensive in January 1942 enabled Rommel to regain Cyrenaica and establish a defensive posture between Mechili and Temrad. The outcome of the operation left the British frustrated and depressed. They criticized the ability of their own leadership to conduct mechanized warfare, and developed an admiration for Rommel, and a deep concern for the Afrika Corps and its deadly weapons.

Rommel's Afrika Corps, which had been defeated tactically and driven back some 500 miles, had avoided strategic disaster. Rommel reversed the tactical results with a daring counterattack two months later. This hurt the British forces and created a great deal of concern in London about the future capabilities of British forces in North Africa.²⁷ The success of this retrograde operation in redressing the operational balance provides important lessons for modern commanders. The influence of leaders who possess a bold and daring style of command is a positive factor in such operations. This style of leadership is exemplified in Rommel's decision to

accept risk and exploit the situation after the battle of Sidi Rezegh. His decision to counterattack following the withdrawal and push the British back to Gazala demonstrates his boldness. Tactical expertise in subordinate officers is indispensable. This was clear during the conduct of the Axis withdrawal. Soldiers must possess a combat spirit and determination to overcome great obstacles. Rommel commented about the ability of his soldiers in a letter to his wife after the withdrawal, "...superhuman exertions lie behind my gallant troops."²⁸ The recovery of energy, morale, and the maintenance of cohesion during a difficult maneuver is clear evidence of the character and esprit de corps of the German soldier. Their ability to maintain discipline is exemplified by the fact that they did not lose large quantities of equipment during the conduct of the withdrawal. This discipline resulted in the maintenance of a coherent fighting force.

The shortening of Rommel's supply lines eased his supply problems. The corresponding increase in the length of British lines of communications hampered logistics for the British. The Germans dominated the combined arms arena with the efficient tactical application of ground weapon systems. They continued to retain freedom of action and react to developments faster than the enemy. Axis forces were generally able to achieve success against superior odds. These factors enabled Rommel to select a retrograde operation to improve his situation in the face of numerical superiority with a depleted combat force.

Manstein's Winter Campaign in Southern Russia : 1942-43

Manstein's 1942-43 winter campaign is another excellent example of a withdrawal under adverse conditions to preserve a force and set conditions for future success. It shows why well trained units in the hands of good tactical commanders are a necessity to give an operational commander the option of conducting retrograde operations. This particular campaign highlights Manstein's operational genius. He demonstrated the vision that overcomes friction with the ability to anticipate conditions on the battlefield and build upon engagements to obtain the desired outcome.²⁹

At the beginning of the campaign, German forces were deployed on a 435 mile arc. The German front began on the Black Sea at Novorossisk and terminated in the Caucasus mountains near the Caspian Sea. The Soviet forces opposing Manstein's Army Group were overwhelming both in men and equipment. The encirclement of the German Sixth Army within Stalingrad had eliminated the strongest German offensive force in the theater. Manstein noted that the issue at hand, "was no longer the fate of a single army but of the entire southern wing of the front and ultimately of all the German armies in the east."³⁰

The German goals within the theater of operations were political and economic. Hitler needed the mineral-rich Donets basin for economic stability within the homeland. Politically he was concerned about the potential impact on Turkey if the Germans lost this particular area to the Soviets. This concern was compounded by Hitler's general unwillingness to relinquish territory gained during the summer of 1942.³¹ For these reasons the German strategic goal was to retain existing positions and conduct operations to restore the situation. Hitler relied on a reserve corps, the newly equipped

SS Panzer Corps, to arrive quickly and overcome Soviet numerical superiority.

The Soviets had the operational initiative. They possessed a general superiority in numbers of 7 to 1. The Soviet strategic goal was the destruction of the southern wing of the German front in order to set the conditions for the annihilation of the German forces in Russia. The Soviets began by driving a 100 mile gap in the Axis front, forcing the collapse of the Rumanian, Italian, and Hungarian sectors. This provided the Soviets complete freedom of action and the opportunity for exploitation to the German lines of communication in the vicinity of Rostov and further west, at the Dnieper crossings. The Soviets believed that the entire right wing of the German army was near collapse as a result of the Stalingrad disaster and thirteen months of continuous fighting. The Soviet operational plan called for the encirclement of the southern German Armies before they could withdraw across the Dnieper. The Soviets launched two operations, code named Star and Gallop, without stopping for a operational pause or establishing sufficient reserves to seal off a German withdrawal.³²

Manstein's alternatives were limited. Offensive operations were possible given the current situation and the ratio of combat forces. He was on the strategic and operational defensive due to the relative imbalance of forces. Hitler demanded a static defense. He argued that the German forces should fight for every foot of ground to make the enemy pay a high cost for any advances.³³ Encircled forces were to continue to fight without withdrawal or surrender. This static defense, Hitler reasoned, would eventually exhaust the Soviet Army which had been on the offensive now for two and one half months. Eventually, Soviet losses would be high and logistical constraints would impact on their advance. Hitler believed the new

technically superior equipment placed in the SS Panzer Corps would have a tremendous effect on the inferior Soviet equipment. Lastly, with Spring approaching, the weather would soon have a retarding impact on operations. The thaw would halt the Soviet armor in the mud.

Manstein did not agree with Hitler. His major concern was for the possible loss of the lines of communication for the entire southern wing.³⁴ This would lead to destruction of those forces and give the Soviets a chance to envelop the entire Eastern front.

Manstein wanted to conduct operational maneuver.³⁵ He realized that the exhaustion of his forces, the lack of reinforcements, and insufficient numbers of men and armor would not permit creation of a continuous front. Anticipated reinforcements, specifically the SS Panzer Corps, required time for movement into the theater.³⁶ Manstein, unlike Hitler, did not want to base his campaign on the effects of weather. Therefore, a static defense was not the means to success. Manstein was confident that his forces could conduct operational maneuver and that this would provide an advantage over the Soviets. Time became the principal asset for his Army Group, time to maneuver and concentrate at decisive areas when necessary. Manstein decided that a mobile defense would achieve a favorable result.

Manstein developed a campaign plan with four parts: first, the relief of the Sixth Army; second, keeping the rear of Army Group A open so it might disengage and withdraw from the Caucasus; third, conducting operations to keep the lines of communication open; and fourth, delivering a counterblow when the opportunity presented itself.³⁷ After all hope of relieving the Sixth Army faded, Manstein decided to withdraw the Don Army Group and Army Group A from their existing positions. He planned to do this in two phases. The first phase required withdrawal behind the Don

River. The second phase, one with which Hitler did not agree, was a withdrawal to positions behind the Dnieper. Forces made available through the consequent shortening of the front were to be concentrated as a mobile reserve. This reserve would maneuver to destroy enemy forces moving around the flanks or penetrating to cut off the German lines of communications.³⁸ In order to accomplish this economy of force operation Manstein had to accept risk. The forces covering the front would be vulnerable. To overcome their overall weakness, units would concentrate forces in strongpoints. This provided for strong opposition at vital areas or the ability to deal a surprise attack whenever the opportunity presented itself. Massing armor for short offensive thrusts and having a well trained headquarters that could think far enough ahead to order a movement so forces would be in the right place at the right time, would enable the withdrawal operation to become a major success.

The final outcome of the retrograde operation permitted a counterstroke that surprised the Soviets with concentric attacks and regained the initiative. This German offensive operation aimed at destroying enemy forces that threatened the crossings on the Dnieper River was in accordance with Hitler's desires. The 4th Panzer Army, reinforced with the SS Panzer Corps, counterattacked the Soviet 1st Guards and 6th Armies along a line between Pavlograd and Grishino. This offensive destroyed the right flank of the Soviet Southwest Front then turned northeast to attack toward Kharkov rolling up the flank of the Soviet Voronezh Front. The 1st Panzer Army was ordered to attack toward the Don river that was being held by the Soviet Southwest Front. The German counterstrike destroyed a large percentage of the combat capability within the Soviet Southwest and

Voronezh Fronts. These two Soviet Fronts were forced to halt their offensive operations and withdraw.

The loss of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad was a blow to the German Eastern Front that the Soviets exploited to the further discomfort of the soldiers of the Third Reich. Ultimately, the Soviets failed to achieve the objectives of destroying the German southern front and recovering all those territories occupied by the Germans during the summer of 1942. Manstein was able to achieve some of Hitler's immediate economic and political goals by conceding terrain to preserve his force and build up a reserve in order to counterattack and destroy enemy centers of gravity. The initiative was returned to the Germans and the Eastern Front stabilized.³⁹

Manstein's ability to conduct a large scale withdrawal and convert it into an envelopment with the aim of destroying major Soviet forces demonstrates his grasp of operational maneuver. Manstein provides two explanations for his success. First, the long established German principles of leadership allowed his commanders to conduct operations with flexibility and resourcefulness and to give every possible scope to the initiative of commanders at all levels.⁴⁰ Second, the morale of the German soldier was a combat multiplier which enabled him to achieve superiority against the vast numbers of Soviets.⁴¹ Tough combat training developed the stamina of German soldiers to perform the difficult tasks required of them under austere circumstances. Manstein possessed the characteristics of a strong willed commander with the vision to maintain a long range focus for his campaign in spite of serious and potentially disastrous short term failures.

Slim's 1944 Imphal-Kohima Campaign

Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim's Imphal-Kohima campaign demonstrates how an operational commander can use a retrograde operation to posture his forces for success by forcing the enemy to achieve an early culmination point. In 1944 the Allied forces in the Far East were opposing the Japanese in a secondary theater of Burma.⁴²

The Allied aim was to re-enter Burma with available forces and attrit the Japanese in order to reduce the risk of further Japanese conquests. At the same time, the Japanese were planning an offensive to destroy Allied forces in Burma. The Japanese long range goals, following the elimination of the Allied resistance, were to gain access to India and force isolated China to bargain for peace under Japanese terms. Operationally, in order to meet these goals, both opposing commanders sought a decisive battle.

The Fourteenth Army under Slim was deployed opposite the Japanese along the Chindwin River in Western Burma. The morale of Slim's forces was high as they prepared for offensive operations. General Slim knew of the enemy's intentions in advance through captured documents and air reconnaissance. He was preparing for a violent battle for he considered the Japanese, who were excellent infantrymen, to be tough opponents with high morale.

The Japanese Fifteenth Army was also preparing for an offensive. Their objectives were the capture of Imphal, a breakout from the Brahmaputra Valley in order to cut off the Allied northern front, and disruption of air resupply to China. The Japanese commander was concentrating his force, approximately 100,000 men, against Slim's northern

sector (occupied by the British IV Corps). The Japanese 15th Army was composed of four divisions, one Indian division, and one tank regiment.

With current intelligence in mind, Slim was concerned about how to conduct the campaign in his northern sector. Slim had three courses of action to consider. First, he could anticipate the enemy offensive by crossing the Chindwin and attacking him first. Second, he could assume the defensive and hold the banks of the Chindwin with all available forces to destroy the enemy as he attempted to cross the river. Third, he could withdraw from his present positions to concentrate the IV Corps in the Imphal plain and fight the decisive battle on ground of his choice.⁴³

The first alternative of going on the offensive was a bold plan, strongly recommended to Slim by many senior officers.⁴⁴ An attack would be in line with the present offensive spirit and high morale of his forces. However, Slim had serious concerns about the feasibility of his plan. The enemy would be able to concentrate against his forces as they crossed the river and established separate bridgeheads. An unopposed river crossing is a major task in itself. The enemy would have superiority of numbers. He would possess shorter, therefore better, lines of communication. In contrast, Slim's extended lines of communication would be over-extended due to lack of roads and bridges to cross the river. Finally, this course of action would not produce the decisive result that Slim wanted.⁴⁵

The second alternative, conducting a forward defense along the Chindwin, also produced concerns for Slim. His force could not concentrate combat power from their present positions. The IV Corps was deployed over a front of 250 miles with two divisions abreast and one division in depth in the vicinity of Imphal. The forward divisions were spread too thinly for defensive operations. The reserve was located too far back and it would not

be able to assist more than one forward division at a time. Slim believed the Japanese could isolate the forward divisions and destroy them piecemeal.⁴⁶ He was concerned about his logistical situation in a defensive operation. His lines of communication were longer than he desired. There was one main supply route in the IV Corps area and there was no time to build another. The supply bases were too far apart to be defended by the already overextended combat forces.

To achieve success Slim had to concentrate a force superior to the Japanese in numbers and armament. Therefore, Slim decided on the third course of action, a retrograde. General Slim believed there were three reasons for conducting a retrograde operation.⁴⁷ First, a commander could retreat in order to seek self-preservation and save his force from destruction. Second, a commander might conduct a retrograde in order to place pressure elsewhere, so the force accepts loss of territory in one area to transfer troops to another for the purpose of massing. Third, a commander could fall back in order to draw the enemy into a situation unfavorable to him. In time the initiative would belong to the defender because of the situation into which the enemy would be forced. Slim felt the last explanation fitted his circumstances.

General Slim weighed the advantages and disadvantages of his decisions. An early withdrawal would dampen the morale of his forces now prepared for the offensive. The withdrawal would fuel the offensive spirit of the enemy force. The loss of territory would depress Allied Countries within the theater. Slim believed that falling back might spread alarm and despondency in India. However, these disadvantages would not change Slim's decisions. The focal point of his effort was the destruction of the

enemy and not the retention of terrain.⁴⁸ He believed that it was of utmost importance to gain and maintain the initiative.

The advantages far outweighed the disadvantages in his decisions to conduct a retrograde. In this course of action Slim would concentrate IV Corps on the Imphal plain and force the enemy to fight on terrain of Slim's choice. This would enable the British to employ fully their tactical strength. The combined use of their armor, artillery, and close air support on the Imphal plain would be decisive against corresponding Japanese weaknesses. The Japanese would have to operate on extended lines of communication while British forces operated on shorter ones. The weather was an advantage for Slim's plan. In order for the Japanese to succeed they would have to defeat the British quickly and avoid the monsoon season which would strangle them logistically.⁴⁹ The air supremacy of Allied forces would benefit the British who could count on air resupply, reconnaissance, close air support, and interdiction. The all-weather airfields around Imphal enhanced these capabilities. With these factors in mind, positive support was provided Slim by his immediate superior, General Sir George Giffard, who agreed with Slim's reasoning.

The British began preparing the Imphal area for the defense. Positions were fortified for an all round defense and stocked with supplies. Airfields were prepared for intense use. Administrative units were armed and trained in combat skills. Staffs developed plans for intra-theater reinforcement. The withdrawal of the forward divisions was planned in detail. Counterattack contingencies were planned with a mobile striking force. An important feature of all plans was timing. It was important for the advanced forces to withdraw under pressure. If they withdrew too soon, they could jeopardize the overall plan and abandon territory unnecessarily.

If they withdrew too late, they were susceptible to attack and defeat in detail. Slim decided that the timing of the order to withdraw should be left to the commander on the scene, a decision he later regretted.⁵⁰ The final decision to withdraw was left to the Corps commander who was responsible to insure everything was timed accordingly.

Slim's campaign developed into four phases. The first phase was the concentration of the widely dispersed IV Corps when the Japanese attacked. The timing of the plan went awry. The Corps and division commanders were slow to react for they believed the Japanese did not pose as great a threat as, in fact, they did.⁵¹ The IV Corps reserve was committed when the Japanese offensive encircled one of the forward divisions. Within a week the Japanese surrounded all IV Corps units, the Imphal garrison, and were moving to outflank the British at Kohima in order to cut their lines of communications.

Kohima was critical to the British because this was the only base in front of Dimapur. Dimapur was the major logistical point, the only supply base and railhead. Slim had anticipated the Japanese would send a regiment toward Kohima. Instead they sent a division.⁵² The British were not prepared for such a heavy thrust. Slim had to move reinforcements in quickly. The main consideration of Slim's army staff was the movement of these reinforcements. Air support was employed to alleviate the immediate problem of rapid reinforcement and resupply of the encircled forces. General Giffard dispatched a division that formed part of his reserve. A race resulted between the arrival of British reinforcements and the Japanese advance.

The next phase was the battle of attrition. The battle did not begin well for the British. The Japanese were pressing hard on the Imphal plain. They placed the Kohima garrison in peril, and they threatened the Dimapur

logistical base. However, the reinforcements gradually brought the British to a level that surpassed the Japanese by two to one. Slim's plan was finally coming together as the siege of Kohima was raised after several heavy engagements. The Japanese went over to the defensive in May 1944. By this time their units were worn down and in poor condition. Their supply system was in shambles and they were losing cohesion due to lack of effective command and control. As the monsoon season arrived, the Japanese lacked the logistical and numerical ability to resist.

The third phase of the campaign was the counteroffensive. As the Japanese changed commanders and attempted suicide attacks, the British were gaining strength and the initiative. By the beginning of June the Japanese forces were breaking up and withdrawing as best they could. Individual Japanese soldiers continued to fight stubbornly but their units were disintegrating. The British began their counterattack to regain the terrain they abandoned during the withdrawal. The Japanese were broken physically and morally.

The last phase of the campaign was the pursuit. The Japanese needed to reequip and reconstitute their forces. The British now drove the Japanese across the Chindwin. The Japanese crossed the Chindwin with less than a third of the forces with which they had begun the offensive. All major equipment was lost or abandoned. Slim's forces were preparing to cross the Chindwin, establish bridgeheads, and conduct a major offensive into the plains of Burma as soon as the monsoon season ended. Slim wanted to strike the Japanese main force before it could recover.⁵³

The first decisive battles in Burma provide professional soldiers with many lessons. The positive effect of air supremacy greatly benefited British plans. Air power made it possible to resupply encircled forces, interdict

Japanese supply lines, eliminate Japanese close air support, and provide outstanding support to the close battle. The British tactical employment of their superior weapon systems was devastating to the Japanese. The combination of artillery, armor, and air power defeated the stubborn Japanese offensive. The Japanese allowed their overextended lines of communication to break their defensive operation.

Slim's operational plan provides outstanding lessons for consideration. Slim stated that he made two mistakes in the conduct of the campaign. The first one was allowing the IV Corps commander to make the decision of when to withdraw.⁵⁴ Slim believed that to place the responsibility on subordinate commanders was neither fair nor wise in regard to the execution of his operational plan. Tactical commanders are bound to be reluctant to retreat without a trial of strength. This reluctance became a real threat to a timely withdrawal. Instead of the withdrawal being carried out without interference it degenerated into a series of fights that forced commitment of the general reserve. This brought Slim close to ending the campaign in defeat.

Slim's second mistake was the underestimation of the Japanese.⁵⁵ This led to the close call at Kohima. Without the ability of his Army staff and the capability to rapidly reinforce this sector, the Japanese would have cut the British lines of communication. This point raised three issues. A commander must understand enemy capabilities and weaknesses, he must know the terrain his forces will fight on in regard to time/distance, and he must know the limitations of his own units.

Slim commented that he was saved from the consequences of his mistakes by two valuable assets. The first was the resourcefulness of his subordinate commanders. The second was the stubborn valor of his

troops.⁵⁶ Slim also demonstrated a grasp of operational art. He understood the importance of concentration. By concentrating his forces he was able to withstand the Japanese offensive and to counterattack quickly when the opportunity arose. Slim clearly knew the value of logistics for operational design. He used logistics as a combat multiplier for his own forces and as a potent weapon against the Japanese.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions from History

There are four general sets of conclusions to be drawn from these historical studies. The first has to do with the commanders' motivations, the second, the relative effect of the retrograde on sustainment, third, the necessity for concentration of the withdrawing force, and fourth, those independent variables that contribute to the success of such maneuvers.

There are two primary motivations for assuming the retrograde. The first is preservation of the force. This is the most immediate aim of the commander. The second is to assume a posture better suited for resuming the offensive. This posture is generally the result of the opportunity to achieve a more economical deployment of forces on better terrain.

There are many reasons why a commander would select a retrograde operation to preserve his force. The need may arise from prolonged fighting which reduces a force to an inferior position, an offensive by an enemy force which is superior in numbers, or a lack of friendly logistical resources that would force a commander to early culmination. For these reasons a retrograde operation could be considered in lieu of holding on to a difficult situation that might develop into a defeat. By deciding to conduct a retrograde before being forced into one, a commander gains an opportunity to mold the situation and achieve advantage over an enemy's intention of pursuit. Rommel's and Manstein's withdrawals demonstrate the desire of the commander to preserve his force. Rommel had the option of either defending in place or conceding terrain by withdrawing. He made a decision to withdraw to a more favorable location in order to preserve his depleted

forces. Manstein did not possess the necessary forces to prevent a Soviet penetration while in a forward defensive position. His forces were exhausted and reinforcements were not available. His decision to conduct a retrograde gained time for reinforcements to arrive and allowed his forces to form a much needed reserve. By controlling the operational battle, Rommel and Manstein did not allow the enemy to develop an effective pursuit against their forces.

The second motivation for a commander to select a retrograde operation is the need to assume a posture better suited for resuming the offensive. The object in this case is to have the enemy suffer an early culmination by forcing him to fight on disadvantageous terms. The aim of the commander selecting the retrograde for this reason is the ultimate destruction of the enemy force. Two of the examples in the historical analysis, the operations of Manstein and Slim, demonstrate the desire of a commander to conduct a retrograde operation better to posture his forces for success. Slim's withdrawal is the best example to demonstrate the benefit of such a redisposition. He chose to withdraw and fight a defensive battle with his forces concentrated on terrain of his choice. The enemy was drawn into an unfavorable situation that depleted his strength. Slim's intention was to weaken the enemy while in a defensive posture then conduct a counterstroke to annihilate him. Manstein's withdrawal allowed him to assume a better posture for future operations. This enabled him to form reserves by narrowing his front and, at the same time, protect his lines of communication. This economical deployment of forces provided Manstein the opportunity to control the flow of battle and establish conditions for success.

The historical examples also show clearly the effect of a retrograde on the relative powers of sustainment. The examples demonstrate how logistics can be used as a weapon against the enemy and as a combat multiplier for a commander. The three campaigns proved the importance of shortening one's own line of communications while extending the enemy's. A shorter line of communication allows for a faster, increased, and more secure supply rate. By withdrawing, a commander would force his adversary to lengthen his line of communication thereby hastening the culmination of an enemy offensive. Rommel's withdrawal back to his supply base enabled him to concentrate combat power and provided him valuable time to resupply and reconstitute. Rommel's shorter lines of communication enabled him to resupply and reconstitute his depleted forces in a short period of time. The British, on a one thousand mile logistical line, developed severe supply problems that weakened their forces. Rommel was able to assume the counteroffensive with his renewed strength before the British could resolve their supply shortages.

The principle of mass or the ability to concentrate was a crucial factor in all three historical examples. Two of the three commanders, Rommel and Manstein, utilized the ability of their forces to maneuver in order to achieve concentration. Slim's plan called for a withdrawal to concentrate his forces due to their difficulty in maneuvering laterally over the terrain he was defending. All three commanders were able to retain freedom of action through agility. This agility created by maneuver and induced by the will of the commander added a desired flexibility to react faster than the enemy and acted as a catalyst for success.

Finally, these examples highlight independent variables that contributed to success in these retrograde operations. These variables can

be aggregated under the rubric of the 'professional abilities' of both commanders and soldiers.

All three commanders had to accept risk in order to achieve success. They were able to condone this risk by having extensive knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their own forces and their adversaries. Each commander was proficient in implementing operational art. Each possessed the tactical expertise and professional characteristics of audacity, courage, and a strong will that urged him to regain the initiative from the enemy. Each commander knew how to utilize his combined arms strengths to his advantage.

The influence of subordinate leaders and the courage of soldiers were another important factor. Their tactical expertise and initiative enabled them to accomplish their missions in difficult situations against superior odds. The combat spirit of the soldier maintained a high state of morale in arduous combat situations that should have negated this quality. Each army commander noted the discipline, cohesiveness, and valor of his soldiers as a main factor in making his operation a success. If these are the lessons of history what are the implications for the earlier theorists?

Theoretical Conclusions

The propositions offered by the three military theorists, Clausewitz, Jomini, and Liddell-Hart, may now be analyzed in accordance with the preceding campaign studies. This analysis will focus on whether history tends to support or refute their theoretical propositions. Some theoretical axioms will remain unanswered without further study. At the same time,

the historical examples have also raised new possibilities worth consideration by operational commanders.

Rommel's withdrawal supports Clausewitz's dictum that one may avoid defeat by yielding terrain on one's own initiative. Rommel knew the condition of his force and had the overall aim of destroying enemy forces instead of retaining terrain. Therefore, he avoided a decisive battle by selecting a withdrawal on his terms and did not allow an effective pursuit to develop. Rommel's forces were able to hasten the enemy's culmination by controlling the enemy's advance. The British lost strength as they moved forward as Clausewitz anticipated.

Clausewitz stated that a commander must consider the cost of losing terrain and sustaining low morale before committing to a retrograde. The commanders in all three examples were concerned more about the loss of morale than terrain. The commanders were not overly concerned about the loss of terrain because their aim was the destruction of the enemy. Morale of the troops was sustained by the will of the commanders and the esprit de corps of the soldiers in question.

Most of Jomini's theoretical axioms are supported by the historical analysis. Some however, require qualification. Jomini's statement regarding the retrograde as the most difficult operation in war is not supported by the three examples. These commanders proved that with disciplined troops retrograde operations are an important part of a commanders' repertoire. Similarly, Rommel's campaign discussed above shows that a commander who withdraws in time can negate the concerns Jomini expressed about the conditions of forces undertaking a withdrawal subsequent to battle.

Jomini postulated three reasons why a commander should conduct a retrograde, to retire before fighting in order to draw the adversary to a

position which the defender prefers to the present one, to retire in order to get near one's supply base, and to retire after a lost battle or unsuccessful operation to conserve one's force. The intent of Slim's withdrawal supports the first two of these reasons. Rommel's withdrawal after his unsuccessful offensive to take Tobruk and drive the British out of North Africa supports the third reason. In addition, all three commanders used the retrograde to draw their forces together precisely as Jomini recommended to achieve concentration and avoid a defeat in detail.

As noted above, Liddell-Hart based his strategy on two economical forms of operations both dealing with an indirect approach for defeating the enemy. Because the baited offensive is not a retrograde it will not be addressed here. The other form, the elastic defense or calculated withdrawal was a defensive-offensive strategy. This defensive-offensive strategy is supported by all three cases. Slim's operational plan is a classic example. Slim's operational intent was offensive in nature. Instead of initiating the offensive before the Japanese he decided to defend objectives critical to the Japanese offensive plan. The Japanese depleted their strength attacking while the British strength grew. When Slim decided to assume the offensive he had numerical and logistical superiority.

Liddell-Hart's axiom concerning the simplicity of the retrograde due to advanced technology is left unanswered. On the face of it, Rommel's ability to break up British road blocks during his withdrawal seems to dispute Liddell-Hart's assertion. On the other hand, Manstein's defenders as well as Slim's tend to support the theory. In Liddell-Hart's case the assertion was largely tactical and is beyond the scope of this paper.

The historical examples have raised two new possibilities worthy of consideration by operational commanders. Manstein's retrograde enabled

him to economize his force and narrow his front, thereby freeing units to create a reserve. This would not be possible in every retrograde operation, however, it is worth consideration by an operational commander who has a front that would be easily penetrated due to a relative numerical inferiority. Another possibility is the use of logistics as a combat multiplier. The ability demonstrated above to impose additional stresses on an enemy force by lengthening its lines of communication to cause early culmination is also worthy of consideration. Such operations, of course, demand the presence of large expanses of terrain capable of sacrifice without abandonment of one's mission. This is especially true in light of the burden placed on logistical operations by modern weapon systems. What can be learned from these historical examples and theoretical propositions which is of use when examining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Warsaw Pact confrontation in Central Europe?

Contemporary Implications

The lessons from this paper are relevant and valuable to a contemporary commander who may have to employ a retrograde operation on a future battlefield. A retrograde within the Central European Theater must be considered as an operational maneuver designed for the purpose of strategic defense. This paper does not alter the need for a forward defense but provides insights about why an operational commander might have to consider a retrograde as a tool to achieve his overall aim.

There are two broad categories of retrograde operations. One deals with actions that are forced by an enemy offensive which allows the defending commander no alternative but withdrawal or sacrifice of his force.

The other encompasses retrograde operations conducted deliberately at the discretion of the commander in order to assume a better posture for defense or counterstrike.

The purpose of a forced withdrawal would be to preserve the force without subjecting it to total destruction. There are two primary events that could force an operational unit into a retrograde. A penetration to an operational depth might force a commander to order a withdrawal to maintain cohesiveness. In addition, a Warsaw Pact first use of nuclear weapons might produce massive losses and most certainly would be followed by armored formations conducting operational breakthrough operations.

There are four situations in which a commander might select a deliberate retrograde as his course of action. These situations are the need for economy of force, a concern for time and space, a desire to avoid a decisive battle, and as a method to secure positional advantage over the enemy. The purpose of conducting a deliberate retrograde is to create more advantageous conditions for subsequent operations.

A deliberate retrograde might be conducted to create a variable force ratio across a given sector. This would facilitate an economy of force in one area while permitting concentration of forces in another. Units conducting an economy of force operation might not be able to defend due to a lack of combat power, therefore, they might conduct a delay to maintain their strength and buy time. At the same time, forces concentrated elsewhere could conduct a counterattack, perhaps to seal a Warsaw Pact penetration. In addition, a commander might wish to free forces operating on a given axis by reducing his front. This would create reserves by shortening the total length of front.

Concern for time and space might be a second reason for a deliberate retrograde. The most critical factor in the defense of NATO is time.⁵⁷ Time affects the arrival and utilization of strategic reserves for all countries within NATO. Providing enough time to react to a Warsaw Pact 'come as you are' surprise attack is vital to the forward defense strategy. A Warsaw Pact surprise attack may require a NATO commander to conduct a retrograde to buy time for the arrival of reinforcements.

The third case of a deliberate retrograde, withdrawal to avoid decisive battle, could result from the threat of hostile envelopment. If a force is severely outnumbered and the commander desires to avoid a decisive engagement, he may withdraw under favorable circumstances and attempt to place the enemy in a disadvantageous position.

Finally, deliberate retrograde may be part of an operational plan. The commander may want to draw enemy forces into a pocket in order to counterattack with mechanized forces or nuclear weapons. The retrograde would be the first phase of such an operational plan.

It is clear that commanders operating in Central Europe might use retrograde operations for a number of reasons. The selection of a retrograde must be analyzed in terms of mission, theory, historical implications, current doctrine, and the given situation. Whether the decision is to conduct a calculated withdrawal or the enemy forces a retrograde to occur, it can be a maneuver designed to achieve success. An operational commander and his staff should be familiar with the costs and benefits of utilizing a retrograde as a tool in order to achieve the overall aim.

ENDNOTES

- 1 U.S., Department of the Army Field Manual, Operations FM 100-5, (Washington, D.C., 1986), p. 153.
- 2 Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). The discussion which follows is taken from pages 469-477.
- 3 Ibid., p. 473.
- 4 Ibid., p. 470.
- 5 Ibid., p. 469.
- 6 Baron de Jomini, The Art of War, translated by G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977). The discussion which follows is taken from pages 231-240.
- 7 Ibid., p. 238.
- 8 Ibid., p. 232.
- 9 B. H. Liddell-Hart, Thoughts on War, (London: Faber and Faber LTD, 1944), p. 205, 241, 270, 293, 294, 312, 318. Liddell-Hart's use of the term strategy in this case is approximately equivalent to our operational art.
- 10 Ibid., p. 270.
- 11 Ibid., p. 317.
- 12 Ibid., p. 198.
- 13 Ibid., p. 241.
- 14 David Irving, The Trail of the Fox, (New York: Avon Publishing, 1978), p. 148-191. The discussion which follows is taken largely from this reference.

- 15 John Strawson, The Battle for North Africa, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 75.
- 16 Ibid., p. 76.
- 17 B. H. Liddell-Hart, The Rommel Papers, translated by Paul Findlay, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 163.
- 18 Ibid., p. 171.
- 19 Irving, op. cit., p. 175-177.
- 20 Barrie Pitt, The Crucible of War, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1980), p. 456.
- 21 Liddell-Hart, The Rommel Papers, p. 171.
- 22 Irving, op. cit., p. 180.
- 23 Liddell-Hart, The Rommel Papers, p. 173, 175.
- 24 Irving, op. cit., p. 183.
- 25 Major General F. W. von Mellenthin and R. H. S. Stolfi with E. Sobrik, NATO Under Attack: Why the Western Alliance Can Fight Outnumbered and Win in Central Europe Without Nuclear Weapons, (Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1984) p. 42.
- 26 Irving, op. cit., p. 185.
- 27 Irving, op. cit., p. 188 & Pitt, op. cit., p. 478.
- 28 Liddell-Hart, The Rommel Papers, p. 178.
- 29 Erich von Manstein, Lost Victories, edited and translated by A. G. Powell (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), p. 368-442. The discussion which follows is taken largely from this reference.
- 30 Ibid., p. 367.
- 31 Lawrence L. Izzo, An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign on the Russian Front 1942-1943, (Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Advanced Operations Studies Fellowship, 1986), p. 34.

- 32 David M. Giantz, From the Don to the Dnepr: A Study of Soviet Offensive Operations, Dec 1942-Aug 1943, (Unpublished Draft Study, U. S. Army War College, 1984), p. 102.
- 33 Manstein, op. cit., p. 410.
- 34 Ibid., p. 373.
- 35 Ibid., p. 374.
- 36 Ibid., p. 435.
- 37 Ibid., p. 375.
- 38 Ibid., p. 374.
- 39 Ibid., p. 438.
- 40 Ibid., p. 382.
- 41 Ibid., p. 441.
- 42 Field Marshal Sir William Slim, Defeat Into Victory, (London: Cassell and Company LTD, 1956), p. 285-346 The discussion which follows is taken largely from this reference.
- 43 Ibid., p. 290.
- 44 Ibid., p. 291.
- 45 Ibid., p. 291.
- 46 Sir Geoffrey Evans and Anthony Brett-James, Imphal, (New York: St Martins Press, 1962), p. 104.
- 47 Slim, op. cit., p. 292.
- 48 Ibid., p. 292.
- 49 Ibid., p. 291.

50 Louis Allen, Burma: The Longest War, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons LTD, 1985), p. 196-197. and Evans and Brett-James, op. cit., p. 107.

51 Ibid., p. 189.

52 Ibid., p. 228.

53 Slim, op. cit., p. 347.

54 Ibid., p. 295.

55 Ibid., p. 305.

56 Ibid., p. 308.

57 Robert H. Murphy, U. S. Strategy for Employing Land Forces in Non-Nuclear Regional War, (Pennsylvania: U. S. Army War College, 1966), p. 18.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

Allen, Louis Burma: The Longest War. London: J. M. Dent and Sons LTD. 1985.

Barnett, Correlli The Desert Generals. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

Clausewitz, Carl von On War, edited and translated by M. Howard and P. Paret Princeton: Princeton Universtiy Press, 1976.

Erickson, BG Vincent J. The Road to Berlin: Continuing the History of Stalin's War with Germany. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976.

Esposito, BG Vincent J. The West Point Atlas of American Wars. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1964.

Evans, Sir Geoffrey and Brett-James, Anthony Imphal. New York: St Martins Press, 1962.

Glantz, David M. From the Don to the Dnepr: A Study of Soviet Offensive Operations, Dec 1942-Aug 1943, Unpublished Draft Study, U. S. Army War College, 1984.

Irving, David The Trail of the Fox. New York: Avon Publishing, 1978 .

Jomini, Baron de The Art of War, translated by G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977.

Liddell-Hart, B. H. The Rommel Papers, translated by Paul Findlay, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953.

Liddell-Hart, B. H. Thoughts on War. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1944.

Macksey, Kenneth The Afrika Korps. New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

Manstein, Erich von Lost Victories, edited and translated by A. G. Powell Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982.

Mellenthin, Major General F. W. von and Stolfi, R. H. S. with Sobrik,
E. NATO Under Attack: Why the Western Alliance Can Fight
Outnumbered and Win in Central Europe Without Nuclear Weapons.
Durham, N. C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1984.

Page, R. T. Manstein: His Campaigns and His Trail. London: Collins Press,
1951.

Pitt, Barry The Crucible of War: Western Desert 1941. London: Jonathan
Cape Ltd., 1980.

Sidorenko, A. A. The Offensive. Washington D. C.: U. S. Goverment
Printing Office, 1970.

Slim, Field Marshal Sir William Defeat Into Victory. London: Cassell and
Company Ltd., 1956.

Strawson, John The Battle for North Africa. New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1969.

United States Military Academy The West Point Military History Series, The
Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean. Edited by Thomas
F. Griess. Wayne, New Jersey: Avery Publishing group, 1984.

Vigor, P. H. Soviet Blitzkrieg Theory. New York: St. Martins Press, 1983.

REPORTS

Freeman, Waldo D. Jr., NATO Central Region Forward Defense: Correcting
the Strategy/Force Mismatch. Washington D. C.: National Defense
University Research Directorate, 1981.

Izzo, Lawrence L. An Analysis of Manstein's Winter Campaign on the
Russian Front, 1942-1943. Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas: Advanced
Operations Studies Fellowship, 1986.

Murphy, Robert H. U. S. Strategy for Employing Land Forces in Non-
Nuclear Regional War. Pennsylvania: U. S. Army War College, 1966.

MANUALS

U.S. Department of the Army Field Manual, Operations FM 100-5.
Washington, D.C., 1986.

END

10-87

DTIC